

WALL CANYON WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA - 46,305 acres

The Wall Canyon WSA (CA-020-805) is located within Washoe County, in northwest Nevada. The WSA includes 46,305 acres of BLM lands and surrounds 1,220 acres of private inholdings. Cedarville, California is 25 miles northwest, Susanville, California is 70 miles southwest and Reno, Nevada is 120 miles south. The eastern boundary is formed by the Wall Canyon and Pinto Springs Roads and private lands. The northern boundary is formed by private lands and the western boundary is formed by a combination of private lands, the Devine Spring Road and the Packsaddle Spring Road. All of the boundary roads are narrow, infrequently maintained dirt and gravel roads.

The WSA includes approximately 15 percent of the Hays Canyon mountain range. It encompasses portions of the top of the range and the eastern slopes. The topography and vegetation are typical of mid-elevation Great Basin mountainous areas with abundant canyons, buttes, rims as well as upland benches and wide valley floors all dominated by sagebrush communities. Elevations range from 5300 to 7340 feet.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE - 0 acres recommended for wilderness 46,305 acres recommended for non-wilderness

Release of all 46,305 acres for uses other than wilderness is recommended. Designating the entire area as wilderness would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long term. However, environmental impacts can be avoided or minimized by using all practical means to manage the released area.

The Wall Canyon WSA meets the minimum wilderness values described in the 1964 Wilderness Act but it differs little from much of the surrounding region other than its lack of roads. Opportunities for both solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation are present but nearby WSA's contain much higher values for wildlife observation, hiking, sightseeing, horseback riding and non-motorized hunting. Although the WSA contains important archaeological sites, they will be protected through archaeological protection laws and regulations regardless of wilderness status. Other nearby WSA's have outstanding or unique characteristics that make them better suited for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Given the lack of special features and the lack of quality wilderness values, releasing the WSA for uses other than wilderness is recommended.

The character of the WSA is mostly natural. Small scale human intrusions are scattered rather evenly across the entire WSA. These include livestock management projects and vehicle ways. These intrusions would remain due to regular maintenance of livestock projects. The WSA is a typical example of mid-elevation mountainous areas in the northern Great Basin. The past human activities have had relatively little impact on the overall character of the landscape and are substantially unnoticeable in the area as a whole.

Conflicts between wilderness values and other resources are minor. The major use of the WSA is by cattle during the summer and wildlife yearlong. Due to regionally high densities of sage grouse and other wildlife, the WSA does receive moderate recreational use by hunters for a two month period in late summer and early fall. During hunting season, management of vehicles on the eastern portions would be a problem if the area was designated wilderness. There are existing access ways and no topographic or vegetation barriers to prevent vehicles from using the existing ways or from travelling cross country. Mining claims occur on less than 200 acres near the northwest corner of the WSA. The mineral potential is rated as low and no mineral development is anticipated. None of the identified resource conflicts would significantly reduce wilderness values over the long term.

3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

A. Naturalness: The Wall Canyon WSA is predominantly natural with limited human imprint. In the WSA, the imprint of man's work is related to facilities to support livestock grazing and access roads and ways for construction and maintenance of the facilities as well as for hunting. The facilities to support livestock grazing include 13 reservoirs, 11 developed springs and 24 miles of fence. Twelve miles of the fence follow bladed lines. All of the projects are low profile and have low impact to naturalness.

The access ways total 16 miles in length. Most of the ways within the WSA receive use only by light vehicles during hunting season and are little more than narrow tracks through the sagebrush. The ways have relatively low impact on naturalness, but have enough use that they are not reverting back to a natural state.

Human related impacts are fairly evenly distributed over the WSA.

B. Solitude: The WSA has outstanding opportunities for solitude over the entire WSA. The boundary roads receive very light use and would have virtually no influence on solitude. The rugged terrain, tall sagebrush and stands of aspen, mahogany and juniper all provide screening to enhance visitor solitude.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: The WSA has limited opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation through hiking, horseback riding and wildlife observation. The WSA has two perennial streams and several live springs which appeal to visitors.

D. Special Features: The WSA supports high archaeological values due to the presence of water and topographic diversity. Several square miles of the region have been surveyed, revealing a highly complex settlement pattern. Present are temporary camps and hunting related lithic scatters on the benches and slopes above drainages, rim-edge chipping stations, many reoccupied camps along major drainages, temporary campsites at stream confluences, canyon rock shelters, and massive obsidian sources. Several archaeological districts of potential National Register quality have been identified.

4. MANAGEABILITY

The WSA could be managed as wilderness to preserve existing values. The steep slopes, tall, dense sagebrush and juniper trees and the presence of large rocks would largely restrict vehicles to the boundary roads and make closures of internal ways effective. The only potential problem would occur if private land owners wanted improved access to their parcels in the northern portion of the WSA. The creation of improved roads could impair the BLM's ability to manage the affected lands as wilderness although the need for improved access is unlikely since the private land is used mainly for livestock grazing.

The only portion of the WSA which would not be easily manageable is along the southern edge, adjacent to private property. The topography is flat to gently sloping with low growing vegetation. The private property is inhabited by sage grouse and during the hunting season, hunters and their vehicles regularly drive off the boundary roads and private lands into the WSA in search of birds.

5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES

No significant potential for mineral development has been identified. There are no mineral leases in this WSA. The WSA is considered by USGS to have no potential for oil and gas. No mining claims currently exist within the WSA. No known mineral exploration activities have occurred. There are no sand and gravel use areas in this WSA.

6. SUMMARY OF WSA-SPECIFIC PUBLIC COMMENTS

A public working group assessing wilderness recommendations for all the Eagle Lake and Surprise Resource Area WSA's could not reach a clear consensus about wilderness recommendations for this WSA.

During the formal public review of the draft EIS, a total of 349 comments specifically addressing this WSA were received. Written comments consisted of 333 letters while 16 oral comments were received at three public hearings. Twenty-five comments support no wilderness while 316 comments supported designation of all or a portion of the WSA as wilderness. Eight comments took no position on wilderness designation. Those favoring wilderness commented on the lack of resource conflicts, the scenic qualities and values associated with the perennial streams and wildlife populations. Virtually all of the comments contained generic listing of the values within the WSA. Those opposing wilderness designation were concerned with impacts of wilderness designation on grazing and future mineral exploration. All of these concerns were generic listings of potential grazing and mineral problems.